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Reference Bonn's Despatch 1209, February 23 and G-1026

The question of defense policy, which was debated without great heat in the Bundestag March 15, became a subject of sharp partisan polemics following a TV performance by Bundestag Deputy Helmut Schmidt (SPD) on the evening of March 15. A statement by Schmidt that Defense Minister Strauss had ~~just~~ made clear quite recently that the Federal Republic wanted only multi-purpose delivery systems but not the atomic warheads themselves brought immediate strong reaction from the governmental side. General Komhuber, the Inspector-General of the Bundeswehr, promptly wrote Schmidt a letter charging him with misleading millions of citizens about the armament plans of the Bundeswehr. The German government, he said, had always made it perfectly clear that it desired merely the multi-purpose systems, but not the atomic warheads. He said it was perfectly well understood that statements calling for atomic weapons were meant in the above sense. The Bundestag Deputy Klingsing, a leading CDU spokesman on defense questions, also issued an official statement in the name of the CDU/CSU Bundestag Fraktion saying that Schmidt's statement was untrue, and Strauss took to the air on the evening of March 16 to repeat the same charge of falsification against Schmidt. Strauss read relevant portions of the Bundestag minutes of the debate on March 25, 1956, as proof of the incorrectness of Schmidt's charge. Meanwhile, Schmidt had issued a press statement. His statement referred to "unclear and changing views of the CDU/CSU and the Federal Government on the question of atomic armament," and he referred to the fact that the so-called "general's memorandum" of August 1960 had demanded atomic weapons for the Bundeswehr without making any distinction between the delivery system and the atomic warheads themselves. He also criticized the judgment of the CDU politicians in involving General Komhuber in a political polemic.

In a subsequent conversation with Embassy officers, Schmidt repeated his allegation that this was a further case of misuse of high-ranking

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Bundeswehr officers by Strauss. He cited the "general's memorandum" and Vice Admiral Buge's published letter to an SPD Bundestag member as previous examples of this tactic which, he said, was designed to influence the numerous Germans who still had great faith in the military. Schmidt clearly felt that Col. Schmuckle was, with Strauss, the main spring behind Kammhuber's letter. During the Bundestag defense debate Schmidt had referred to Schmuckle disparagingly as "the press officer who sometimes wears the uniform of a colonel." Apart from the issue of interference by "generals" in politics—which Kammhuber's letter had obviously attempted to justify in advance by citing previous criticisms of soldiers because "we remained silent in the past when we knew at the time that falsehoods were being used as a political means and thus the people were being misled"—Schmidt was clearly annoyed by the fact that the letter had been released to the press and sent to the Bundeswehr troops before it reached Schmidt.

During his TV appearance, Schmidt also discussed the extent to which MC-70 could be considered as binding for the Federal Republic. (The significance of this point lies, of course, in election campaign repetition of Strauss' claim that the SPD's present assertion of support for NATO and fulfillment of the Federal Republic's defense obligations cannot be considered as genuine in view of the SPD's refusal to accept, for the Bundeswehr, certain weapons requirements laid down in MC-70.) Schmidt repeated Erler's assertion that MC-70 was not equivalent to a treaty and pointed out that MC-70 is merely one in a series of planning documents. He emphasized that other nations, e.g., France and Great Britain, have not met the goals established in MC-70.

The TV discussion also resulted in an elaboration of Schmidt's views on the essential characteristics of a tactical NATO force armed with nuclear weapons systems. The following are the main points made by Schmidt:

1. Bundeswehr participation should be made contingent on the inclusion of other NATO nations' nuclear armed tactical forces, including American, British, French, in a unified NATO force.
2. The command structure of this nuclear tactical force should also be clearly separated from that controlling the conventional forces in order to preclude the use of nuclear weapons by accident or in a panic situation. He drew a parallel here to the Wehrmacht poison gas troops which, during World War II, were not allowed to use gas in their own defense without special authorization.

Schmidt also in effect denied Strauss' conclusion that clear organizational separation of nuclear from conventional forces would necessarily mean that the former would be removed to the "hinterland." The former could be physically near the latter; the essence of the problem is to distinguish the lines of command of the respective forces.

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3. The decision on the "release," i.e., the use in principle, of nuclear weapons should be made by a political authority. Conceding that he could not envisage a more suitable solution, Schmidt admitted that it would probably be best if the machinery for a political decision on the use of nuclear weapons remained as it is: that is, legally the decision is the responsibility of the NATO Council; de facto the American President would make the decision.

4. The decision to employ tactical nuclear weapons—once a political decision has been made to "release" them—must be made at an appropriately high military level. According to Schmidt, the potential disadvantage of a possible delay in responding with tactical nuclear weapons would be outweighed by the advantage that a somewhat slow-moving system would insure their use only in a case of absolute necessity. In response to criticism of this point on the ground that the Soviet frontline troops were equipped with tactical nuclear weapons, Schmidt stated that on the basis of his discussions with U.S. and UK sources he did not believe the Soviets' tactical nuclear weapons were so integrated. He countered the assertion that, in any case, the Soviet conventional forces far outnumbered those of NATO with the claim that this need not be the case: he blamed reliance on the theory of "massive retaliation" for the failure to buildup conventional forces in the West, including the United States.

In a summary of the discussion, Schmidt indicated clearly that he personally would be prepared to accept the armament of the Bundeswehr with tactical nuclear weapons (the atomic warheads remaining under American control), under the foregoing conditions, if the U.S. were to make such a proposal.

The episode is illustrative once again of the highly political atmosphere in which the discussion of atomic weapons is being carried on in the Federal Republic. The CDU/CSU has made no secret that it intends to push the SPD hard on the defense issue, and the speed with which it reacted to the opening given by Schmidt shows how alert CDU/CSU leaders are to every possibility to exploit this issue. Actually, Schmidt is on the right wing of the SPD on this issue and in his new book "Retaliation or Defense" (Vergeltung oder Verteidigung) has made an attempt to educate the SPD on this issue.

It is not at all clear at this juncture to what extent the rank and file of the SPD as represented, say, by Party Chairman Ollenhauer, will go along with the theories propounded by Schmidt. When questioned by an Embassy officer on this point, Schmidt seemed confident that he was not out of step with the SPD. He mentioned, in this context, that the rumors which were circulating after the Hannover Convention that he was in disfavor, even in his own electoral district, were unfounded. He said that he had been renominated for the Bundestag by a 174 to two vote of his district's SPD delegates.

It is also worthy of note that Ollenhauer, in a campaign speech in Renscheid after the Bundestag defence budget debate, used only the evasive formulation "one

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should not work towards the atomic armament of the Bundeswehr" (...auf die atomare Bewaffnung der Bundeswehr nicht hingewirkt worden ~~werden~~) rather than his more categorical rejection made at Hannover last fall.

Schmidt challenged Strauss to debate these issues further on TV, Strauss accepted, and the debate will take place on the evening of March 21.

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